



FOR CALENDAR LISTING

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NOAA PROPOSES RULE PROHIBITING SPEARFISHING GEAR IN GRAY'S REEF NATIONAL MARINE SANCTUARY

*Public meeting March 19, 6-8:00 p.m.
Stevens Wetlands Center @ J F Gregory Park
Cedar Street, Richmond Hill, GA*

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) is proposing a rule to prohibit all spearfishing gear in Gray's Reef National Marine Sanctuary. NOAA is soliciting public comment until May 4, 2009. A public meeting will be held on March 19, to receive comments on the proposed rule and the draft environmental assessment that accompanies the proposed rule. The meeting will be held at the **John W. Stevens Wetlands Education Center, located in the rear of J.F. Gregory Park, Richmond Hill, Georgia** (**Directions: From I-95 take Exit 90 and travel east approximately three miles to the junction of SR 144 and US 17. Turn right onto SR 144 and continue east to the junction of SR 144 and Cedar Street. Turn left onto Cedar Street), from 6-8:00 p.m.**

Comments may also be submitted electronically to www.regulations.gov (search for docket # NOAA-NOS-2009-0002), or by mail to Gray's Reef National Marine Sanctuary, 10 Ocean Science Circle, Savannah, GA 31411, Attn: Dr. George Sedberry, Superintendent.

For copies of the proposed rule, draft environmental assessment and the *Federal Register* notice, go to <http://graysreef.noaa.gov>, or contact Resource Protection Coordinator Becky Shortland (912-598-2381; becky.shortland@noaa.gov).

Spearfishing is often used to selectively target larger fish, and can significantly reduce abundance and alter the relative size structure of target species toward smaller fish. The proposed prohibition would provide protection to the fishes and natural live-bottom community for which the sanctuary was designated. The proposal also would facilitate enforcement of an existing prohibition against the use of powerheads within the sanctuary.

Designated in 1981, the sanctuary is one of the largest near shore live-bottom reefs off the southeastern United States, encompassing approximately 23 square miles. The Gray's Reef sanctuary consists of a series of sandstone outcroppings and ledges up to ten feet in height, in a predominantly sandy, flat-bottomed sea floor. The live bottom and ledge habitat support an abundant reef fish and invertebrate community. Loggerhead sea turtles, a threatened species,

also use Gray's Reef year-round for foraging and resting, and highly endangered Northern right whales are occasionally seen in the sanctuary.

The NOAA Office of National Marine Sanctuaries, which manages the Gray's Reef sanctuary, seeks to increase the public awareness of America's marine resources and maritime heritage by conducting scientific research, monitoring, exploration and educational programs. Today, the sanctuary program manages 13 national marine sanctuaries and one marine national monument that together encompass more than 150,000 square miles of America's ocean and Great Lakes natural and cultural resources.

NOAA understands and predicts changes in the Earth's environment, from the depths of the ocean to the surface of the sun, and conserves and manages our coastal and marine resources. Visit <http://www.noaa.gov>.

On the Internet:

NOAA: <http://www.noaa.gov>

NOAA's National Ocean Service: <http://oceanservice.noaa.gov>

Office of National Marine Sanctuaries: <http://sanctuaries.noaa.gov>

Gray's Reef National Marine Sanctuary: <http://www.graysreef.noaa.gov>